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Hans Tofte—Superspy Caught in the Middle of a CIA Furor

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By CLARK MOLLENHOFF
Minneapolis Tribune
Staff Correspondent

WASHINGTON, D.C. —
The life of an Iowa business-
man was pleasant but un-

Analysis:

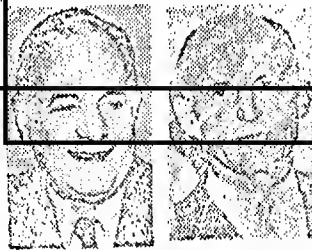
WHAT THE
NEWS
MEANS

eventful for Hans V. Tofte. He had already lived through a series of experiences that would have done credit to Lawrence of Arabia when the Danish-born Tofte and his Iowa-born wife, Marlys, moved to Iowa with the intention of living out their years in Mason City.

THEY HAD purchased the controlling interest in Klipto Loose Leaf Co. in Mason City from Mrs. Tofte's uncle, John Corsaut. Tofte was determined to be what he considered a typical Midwestern businessman. He joined the Masons, the Rotary Club, the American Legion, the Mason City Chamber of Commerce and the Elks.

Through a mutual interest in military affairs and because of a mutual acquaintanceship through the late Gen. William (Wild Bill) Donovan, wartime head of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Tofte and his wife became close friends of Gen. Hanford MacNider, one of the most distinguished citizens of northeast Iowa.

But even in the first months in Mason City Tofte was in contact with an old friend from his OSS days, Frank G. Wisner. Wisner had become the head of the clandestine operations of the pack his clothes, that he was recently created Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), not have time to return to Iowa.



Donovan MacNider

Wartime record
and he needed an experienced undercover agent to handle planning and execution of operations for the nation's big international spying activity.

TOFTE PASSED off the suggestions that he join the CIA with the comment that he "would be available if you get an emergency that is big enough."

The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 brought a call from Wisner, asking that he come to Washington, D.C.—He left within hours, and in Washington was told that Wisner considered this emergency large enough, and there was a need for a man with Tofte's experience and particularly his fluency in Chinese, Japanese and Russian.

There were conferences at the highest levels in government, including the then Defense Secretary Gen. George C. Marshall, and Tofte agreed to accept the assignment—starting from scratch to build the CIA operation in Korea. He was to be based in Tokyo, Japan, and was to work directly with Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

THERE WAS no time for delay. Tofte called his wife in Mason City, told her to pack his clothes, that he was recently created Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), not have time to return to Iowa.

In Tokyo, he used a letter of introduction from MacNider on the stationery of the Northwestern State Portland Cement Co. of Mason City.

"This will be presented by my good friend and fellow townsman, Lieut. Col. Hans V. Tofte, presently at your headquarters," MacNider wrote. "Col. Tofte can tell you in his own story of some rather remarkable service in World War II, a good part of which was spent in the OSS under our mutual friend, Bill Donovan, who considered him one of his ablest and most valuable operatives."

"Col. Tofte has spent a good part of his adult life in the Far East, particularly in Manchuria and China, and would seem to have all the necessary background to be of definite service to you in the present emergency. I have faith in his abilities, his loyalty and his resourcefulness, and I commend him to your consideration for any tasks for which you may feel his experience qualifies him."

In a similar letter to Maj. Gen. C. A. Willoughby, who was in charge of intelligence for MacArthur, MacNider commented:

"TOFTE DID some outstanding work in the last big fracas for Bill Donovan, who told me only a few days ago that he considers him one of the best in almost any capacity for which his experience qualifies him."

That was to be a one-year job for the CIA, but at Wisner's request it stretched on through 1952, and then there were other "special projects" in other parts of the world.

Tofte stepped off from his CIA assignment in 1954, and returned to Mason City.

He jumped into it with the same enthusiasm he had for his work in espionage and unorthodox warfare.

ALSO, starting with a speech before a luncheon group in Clear Lake, Tofte launched a career as a public speaker that won him a wide reputation in the Midwest.

Of course, he was not billed as one of the superspies of the CIA agency, but he could deal publicly with his danger-filled activities in the Danish underground in 1940, his work in 1941 and '42 with the British commandos in guerilla warfare in Burma, his entry into the OSS as an instructor and later as an operator in northern Africa and Yugoslavia, from 1943 through 1946.

The gun-running activities from Italy to Yugoslavia were regarded as essential to the survival of the forces of Marshal Josip Tito, and Tofte and a Capt. Robert Thompson, who shared the command were decorated by the Yugoslavian government, and were awarded the Legion of Merit by the United States government with Donovan making the presentation.

Although decorated by Tito's government, Tofte made Tito one of the major targets of his remarks on the Midwestern speaking circuit where he warned that the Yugoslavian Communist could not be called an ally, simply because he was at odds with the United States.



Tito